

In the Plays

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

WHEN reconstruction begins in the theatre, where will its influence be felt first? When the public ceases to rush to the theatre in paying hordes, whatever the quality of the performance may be, where will the resulting vacancy first be visible? Undoubtedly in the theatres that house the musical plays. In no other species of theatrical diversion has the strain to supply an abnormal demand been so evident. After the depression following the outbreak of the war the play with music became the most popular resort of theatregoers. Apparently there was nothing else they wanted to see. Certainly there was nothing else they wanted to see so much.

There is a good reason for this preference. The American stage managers meant the musical plays today as none of their rivals in other countries. Not only in magnificence, which after all may be a negligible quality in these pieces, but in spirit, in humor and certainly in the beauty of the women, the American play with music is the best in the world. It moves with incomparable spirit, it flashes and bubbles, and it serves, in a word, all the purposes of humor blended with music. At least it seemed to until the number of these affairs became a tax on the ingenuity of their producers which they were unable to meet. There is a limit to the inventiveness of the men responsible for these things, just as there is a limit to the ingenuity of the poets and the productiveness of the jazz annotators.

The supply of human attractiveness is rarely if ever exhausted, the material to aid beauty is equally abundant and all the outward and visible signs of the entertaining musical play are at hand. But its wit, its melodies, its intrigue—this season these have often been abysmal in their puerility and dullness. In spite of the high cost of no clothes the magnificence of the affairs continues as great as ever. Brocade and taffetas, lace and sequins sweep recklessly over the stage. They may be extravagant in price, but they are still cheaper to buy than wit or imagination. Just how plentiful the human body may be swarms of smirking figurants demonstrate. How priceless are wit and originality the dreary banality of the speeches proclaims. Expert dancing brings for the delight of the eye many picturesque and graceful evolutions. The turns in the dialogue never by any chance produce a quirk that will appeal to one's appetite for wit. Composers tell us—rival composers, that is—how little ingenuity there is in the scores, which they say are as much without talent as the text. Luckily, it takes a knowledge of music to know how bad the ditties really are. It is enough for the layman to suffer under the jokes.

Not all of the musical plays of the season have been so indifferent in quality. Yet the majority has fallen below the most modest standard. Certainly a return of discrimination and selection in the quality of their entertainment will influence theatregoers to reject these pieces more decidedly than they do at present. Some of the worst appear to enjoy a degree of popularity, to judge by the length of time they are played. There are, of course, many insurmountable business devices that seem to prolong the life of a play. They are often not really prosperous when they seem to be. That nine out of every ten musical plays are, however, beneath all artistic contempt is plain to every victim that suffers under them.

Not long after the death of Charles Lecocq his most noted work was consecrated by performance at the Opera Comique, in Paris. "La Fille de Mme. Angot" took its place in the repertoire of this national theatre of France by the side of "Mignon," "Carmen" and "Manon." So Lecocq is now the associate in the musical pantheon of his country of Thomas, Bizet and Massenet. This same opera has just been sung in London under ambitious conditions. There was a new, or rather a rewritten, libretto, while important singers and actors and all the aids to a success for this famous work were at hand.

The lack of new operettas in France during the war has turned the impresarios to the old masterpieces. Offenbach's "La Belle Helene" had a prosperous revival there during the last season. There was no lack of appreciation of the composer's immortal score. No attempt was made to provide a new libretto. The Melhaec and Halevy texts shared in their day the glory of Offenbach's music. They are difficult to bring into harmony with public taste in this country now. Richard Ordynski's effort to put "Fair Helen" before our public failed on account of the barrenness of the libretto in comparison with what the public expects to-day. When "La Belle Helene" was revived in Paris there was a discussion as to the advisability of trying a new book. It was decided to let the piece take its chances as it was. Success proved the wisdom of this decision. The Paris public found the old humor in the mythological character of the story. To see the gods and goddesses chortling about like very ordinary humans still possesses the power to entertain an audience in a Paris theatre. Here nobody at a musical comedy ever knows anything about mythology.

Undoubtedly "La Fille de Mme. Angot" needed a newly written text for London. Donald Calhoun, the playwright, undertook the task. Its book may have kept the work so long from our stage, although managers are rarely inclined here to risk much on any but an altogether new work. "La Fille de Mme. Angot" was last sung here at the New Theatre during the first year of its existence. There were such singers as Frances Alda and Edmond Clement in the leading roles. Beautiful costumes and scenery were brought from the attics of La Scala in Milan. Certainly the Opera Comique has not improved on these details of New York's performance. The failure of the revival was complete. There is a story, probably apocryphal, of a single spectator on one night in the capacious balcony of this beautiful theatre listening to this incomparable performance. Naturally no impresario has ever tried the work since.

There was, of course, no need of a new libretto for the opera when it was alongside of "Les Contes d'Hoffmann," canonized at the Opera Comique. Nobody expects very hilarious entertainment there. It is as foreign almost to the spirit of the Opera Comique as of the Opera. It is the music and the contemplation of the pictures that one enjoys in these artistic surroundings. Indeed, the buffoonery of the singers in "La Belle Helene" is rather difficult ever to conceive there, dull as we may regard them.

Indeed, the firm of Offenbach, Melhaec & Halevy seems lost to our stage. It was, of course, inevitable that Lillian Russell should sing the beautiful Helen as well as the duchess who loved the military at the height of her popularity. She also appeared in "La Perichole," as there was still, especially in the minds of her admirers, a faith in opera bouffe. None of the later revivals of Offenbach was, however, so successful as the numerous representations of "Orpheus and Eurydice," called "Orpheus and Eurydice," at the old Bijou Theatre. Of course the score is immortal. In this series of performances at the old Bijou Theatre, who was the exquisite Venus, died only the other day. Isabel Urquhart, a Dione of classic beauty; Laura Joyce Bell, an appropriately majestic Juno; Marie Vanoni, clever and artistic actress, descended from a family of pantomimists, and Ida Muller—these were some of the most famous of the contemporaneous stage beauties that made a brilliant cluster of fervent loveliness to enhance the charms of the work. Ida Muller is perhaps the only survivor of this noted group. She is active enough to be a lively figure in "Chu Chin Chow" ever since its first representation.



KATHLEEN MARTYN
IN THE
NEW ZIEGFELD
MIDNIGHT
FROLIC



CHARLES CHERRY and FRANCINE LARRIMORE
IN "SCANDAL"



MAXINE ELLIOTT
IN "TRIMMED IN
SCARLET"

'NIGHT BOAT,' 'MY GOLDEN GIRL' AND 'TRIMMED IN SCARLET' COMING

MONDAY—Maxine Elliott's Theatre—"Trimmed in Scarlet," a comedy by William Hurlbut, in which Miss Maxine Elliott will play in her own theatre for the first time in nearly ten years. Her rôle is that of a woman unjustly gossiped about. Lumsden Hare, Stanley Warmington, Sidney Blackmer, Montague Ruthford, Biron Eagan and Misses Katharine Stewart, Peggy Payter, Elizabeth Bellairs, Sylvia Newton and Gwendolyn Valentine are in the cast.

Liberty Theatre—"The Night Boat," musical comedy by Miss Anne Caldwell and Jerome Kern, with a cast including John E. Hazard, Misses Louise Groody, Ada Lewis, Stella Hoban, Ernest Torrence, Hal Skelliff, Hansford Wilson, Mrs. John Findlay, Jack Scannell, Misses Arline Chase, Betty Hale, Marie Regan, Lois Leigh, Patricia Clarke, Lydia Scott and the Caninos.

Nora Bayes Theatre—"My Golden Girl," musical play with score by Victor Herbert and book by Frederic Arnold Kummer. In the cast are Victor Morley, Miss Marie Carroll, Ned A. Sparks, Misses Helen Bolton, Edna Mae Oliver and Dorothy Tierney, George Trabert, Robert O'Connor and Harold Vizard; also Dore and Cavanaugh.

TUESDAY—Elitine Theatre—"Breakfast in Bed" with Miss Florence Moore as the star. It is a farce by Georges Feydeau, adapted for the American stage by Willard Mack and Hilliard Booth. The other players include Leon Gordon, Will Deming, Tommy Meade, Harry Hanlon, Fred Strong, Vincent Dennis and Misses Clara Verdera and Gladys Gilbert.

Moresco Theatre (Afternoon)—"Beyond the Horizon," a tragedy in four acts by Eugene O'Neill, which will be presented in a series of special matinees, not interfering with the engagement of "For the Defense" at this theatre. Richard Bennett, Miss Helen MacKellar and Edward Arnold will have the chief rôles.

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"DEAR SIR: I note you say that 'Ruddigore' has only been produced once in this country—the time it was done by the British company at the Fifth Avenue Theatre in 1887. Why, my dear man, Col. John A. McCaull made a fine production of 'Ruddigore' at his theatre (McCaull's Opera House) in Philadelphia either the same year the work was produced in New York or the year following. I forget which, and it had a run of six weeks or two months. While I am not sure, I am under the impression the Colonel took it to Chicago afterward. James Ryley, husband of the talented Madeline Lucette Ryley—I trust I have her name right—and a most excellent and popular comedian, was in the cast, if I am not mistaken. Henry Askin, who, I believe, is at present on the staff of Charles Dillingham, will certainly bear me out in my statements, for he was an usher at McCaull's in those days and will no doubt recall the production. So will Mme. Cottrell or any of the other McCaull artists that are still with us. Always an ardent admirer of your page."

"AUBURN, N. Y., January 25."

"HORACE G. BENSON,

Plays That Continue.

"Lightnin'"	.....Gaiety
"East Is West"	.....Astor
"Happy Days"	.....Hippodrome
"Scandal"	.....39th Street
"Adam and Eva"	.....Longacre
"The Jest"	.....Plymouth
"Clarence"	.....Hudson
"The Gold Diggers"	.....Lyceum
"The Storm"	.....8th Street
"Ziegfeld Midnight Frolic"	.....N. A. Roof
"Déclassée"	.....Empire
"Apple Blossoms"	.....Globe
"The Little Whopper"	.....Casino
"His Honor Abe Potash"	.....Bijou
"Passing Show of 1919"	.....Winter Garden
"Ruddies"	.....Selwyn
"The Magic Melody"	.....Shubert
"Wedding Bells"	.....Harris
"Irene"	.....Vanderbilt
"The Son-Daughter"	.....Belasco
Plays in French	.....Theatre Paraisien
"Aphrodite"	.....Century
"One Night in Rome"	.....Cohan
"My Lady Friends"	.....Comedy
"Monsieur Beaucaire"	.....New Amsterdam
"Abraham Lincoln"	.....Cort
"For the Defense"	.....Morosco
"The Sign on the Door"	.....Republic
"The Famous Mrs. Fair"	.....Miller's
"Geat's Midnight Whirl"	.....Century Roof
"Angel Face"	.....Knickerbocker
"Smilin' Through"	.....Broadhurst
"The Acquittal"	.....Cohan & Harris
"The Purple Mask"	.....Booth
"The Light of the World"	.....Manhattan Opera House
"Frolics of 1920"	.....44th Street
"The Passion Flower"	.....Greenwich Village
"Always You"	.....Lyric
"Pietro"	.....Criterion
"The Ruined Lady"	.....Playhouse
"Mamma's Affair"	.....Little
"The Power of Darkness"	.....Garrick
"Big Game"	.....Fulton
"As You Were"	.....Central

MISS BELLE BAKER ON BILL AT PALACE

Musical Acts to Predominate There This Week—Entertainers on Other Vaudeville Programmes.

Music and musical comedy will compose most of this week's bill in the Palace Theatre. Miss Belle Baker will sing songs, Joseph E. Howard and Miss Ethelyn Clark will appear in "Chin Toy," a musical romance, with Maurice Diamond, Martin and Fabbri, Jack King, Miss Ruth Reed, Gu Sun Ki, Miss Helen Smith and a dozen girls; William Seabury and company will remain a second week in "Frolics," a revue, and Mehlinger and Meyer, composer and singer, will do their popular songs.

Miss Dorothy Shoemaker will appear in "Life," a one-act play by Miss Blanche Bloch. George N. Brown, walker, and the Al Golem Troupe also will be there.

On the programmes at other vaudeville theatres are:—

RIVERSIDE—Miss Sophie Tucker and her Kings of Syncopation, "The Spanish Revue" and the Juggling Nelsons.

COLONIAL—Pat Rooney and Miss Marion Bent in "Rings of Smoke," a second week; Piller and Douglass, George Austin Moore and Melnotte and Leddom.

EIGHTY-FIRST STREET—Miss Sheila Terry, dancer, in a musical romance, "Three's a Crowd"; Miss Norma Talmadge in the photo-drama, "A Daughter of Two Worlds"; Dugan and Raymond and Miss Bessie Browning and Jack Denny.

ALHAMBRA—Miss Anna Wheaton and Harry Carroll in songs; Sam Mann, Miss Frances Pritchard, Harry Breen and the Misses Marie and Mary McFarland.

ROYAL—Frank Dobson and his Thirteen Sisters, Miss Jean Adair, George MacFarlane, Owen McGivney and Miss Sylvia Loyal.

AMERICAN—Bert Crossman's Sailor's Review, men of the crew of the U. S. S. George Washington; Shelton Brooks and Horace George with jazz music; Miss Jessie Hayward in "Air Castle Kate," the Mystic Hanson Trio.

FIFTH AVENUE—Patricola, Kaufman Brothers and Arthur Fields, the Fashion Minstrels and Leonard and Porray.

Concerts will be given this afternoon and tonight in the Palace, the American, the Fifth Avenue, the Twenty-third Street, the Colonial, the Eighty-first Street, the Riverside, the Alhambra and the Royal Theatres and tonight in the Century Theatre and the Manhattan Opera House.

Home Towns of Chorus Girls.

At the Winter Garden a list has been made of the "home towns" of the 15 young women in the chorus in "The Passing Show of 1919." They seem to come from all part of the world—thirty-eight came from New York city, eleven from Brooklyn, sixteen from Chicago, ten from England, nine from France, seven from San Francisco, four from Philadelphia, three from Boston, two from Baltimore, two from Canada, three from St. Louis, two from Switzerland, and one each from Bombay.

Theatre Paraisien's Programme.

After all its lively, entertaining performances since the opening last November only a fortnight remains of the season of the Theatre Paraisien. With the termination of its local engagement the company will be sent intact to Montreal for a limited engagement, and thence to New Orleans. The season here has been interesting. It has developed the fact that American playgoers are chiefly interested in plays in French when the plays are of light texture.

"Ma Tante d'Honfleur," the present bill which was presented for the first time last Monday, is to be continued another week. It is an highly amusing farce comedy, acted with verve and charm.

New Features in "Happy Days."

In "Happy Days," which reaches its twenty-fourth week at the Hippodrome, new features will be noted tomorrow with the interpolation of a new ballet divertissement in the "Flower Shop" scene. This new Terpsichorean novelty will introduce a group of eleven chief dancers, the Four Amaranths and Misses Cissie Hayden, Valodia Vestoff, Daisy Smythe, Elizabeth Coyle, Frances Mann, Sylvia Stone and Inez Bauer.

Burton Holmes' Lecture.

This evening, again tomorrow afternoon, Burton Holmes will continue his popular series of travelogues at Carnegie Hall with "Allies on the Rhine" as his subject. The cities which are the centres of occupation, with comparisons of methods of control by the Allies, are said to be highly interesting.

In Neighborhood Theatres.

"Nightie Night," which recently completed a long engagement at the Princess Theatre, will be the attraction this week at the Shubert-Riviera. The farce has the original cast, headed by Francis Byrne.

Mr. and Mrs. Coburn, in "The Better Ole," with the chief players of their original cast, will go to the Standard tomorrow.

"Good Morning, Judge," which will be seen at the Bronx Opera House this week, has a cast headed by George Hassell in the rôle of the Judge. The score is by Lionel Monckton and Howard Talbot.

Burlesque at the Columbia.

At the Columbia Theatre this week will be the Burlesque Wonder Show, with George F. Murphy and Miss Primrose Semon. The programme consists of a burlesque, vaudeville specialties and musical features designed to keep the audience laughing. The book was written by Joseph Mitchell, the lyrics by R. McDonald and the music by Nat Osborne. The cast includes Miss Edna Green, Miss Clara Lougless, Frank Martin, Arthur Conrad and Miss Florence Newman.